



AN EVALUATION OF SPA WEBSITES AND PERCEPTION OF THERMAL HOTELS GUESTS TO DEVELOP HISTORICAL REGIONS *IN SOUTH-EAST OF TURKEY*

*Türkiye'nin Güneydoğusunda Tarihi Bölgeleri Geliştirmede Termal Otel Müşterilerinin
Alguları ve Web Sitelerinin Değerlendirmesi*

Lokman TOPRAK*, **Samah A. MAHMOOD****, **Hala H. ELSAYED*****

ABSTRACT

"Health is no more defined only as just the absence of disease, but also as a philosophy of life and a valuable everyday life target". To lead a healthy life, most people have recently started to visit Spas for stress reduction; healthy eating and losing weight, fitness, therapeutic nutrition or other health issues with thermal water activities are most prominent.

Although there are quite rich hot springs and thermal tourism potential in Turkey, the so far little developed South-Eastern Turkey thermal resources are not very well employed. Under the evidence of closer examination for the investigated region, it has been revealed that a few thermal facilities are licensed by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. A minimum range of high quality thermal facilities is being served there, though. In terms of treatment, hygienic conditions and accommodation facilities are still not coping with European standards. This study aims to evaluate Spa Websites and perception of acceptance for thermal hotels to develop historical regions and delineate the opportunities of thermal in Case studies from Çermik, Urfa, Batman and Siirt along with its weak and strong aspects and suggest some recommendations for branding the targeted thermal springs as competitive day- Spas that provide high level of professional hospitality service. Content analyses for governmental and nongovernmental websites are conducted to get an insight view into the promotion of the targeted thermal springs in South-Eastern Turkey. In addition surveys with the thermal hotel guests are applied to the study area to evaluate and examine the perception of customers. Overall, the results of the study suggest that a carefully designed, professional day-spa that provides specific hospitality and thermal service in addition to stable prices and a strong promotion of the new destinations could be a competitive advantage for enhancing thermal tourism in the study area. This study also suggests that encouraging further cooperation between the modern health care services and the traditional practitioners will enhance the thermal spring regions of Southeastern Turkey economically.

Keywords: Spa, thermal hotels, healthy life style, historical regions, Turkey

ÖZET

Sağlık artık sadece hasta olmama hali değil bir yaşam felsefesi ve gündelik bir hedef olarak da tanımlanır. Sağlıklı bir hayat sürmek için son zamanlarda birçok insan kaplıcaları ziyaret etmeye başlamıştır. Stresi azaltmak, sağlıklı yemek, kilo vermek, fitness yapmak, terapötik beslenme ve diğer termal su aktiviteleri en yaygın olan sebepler arasındadır. Türkiye'de birçok sıcak kaynak suyu ve termal turizm potansiyeli olmasına rağmen Güneydoğu'daki az gelişmiş kaplıcalar çok da iyi çalıştırılmamaktadırlar. Söz konusu bölgenin yakından incelenmesinden sonra sadece bir kaç kaplıcanın Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı onaylı olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Bunlardan da çok azı yüksek kalitede hizmet vermektedir. Davranış, hijyenik durum ve ağırlama açısından bu işletmeler hala Avrupa standartlarında değildir. Bu çalışma Çermik, Urfa, Batman ve Siirt'teki kaplıcaların Kaplıca web sitelerini değerlendirip bu işletmelerin buldukları tarihi bölgeyi geliştirmedeki etkilerini güçlü ve zayıf yanlarıyla incelemekte ve markalaşma, hedef belirleme konusunda spalarla rekabet açısından önerilerde bulunmaktadır. Güneydoğu Anadolu'daki kaplıcaların resmi ya da resmi olmayan siteleri içerik açısından tanıtıma dair daha iyi bir fikir vermesi için incelenmiştir. Ayrıca çalışma sahasında kaplıcada kalanlarla da konukların algısını anlamak için anketler yapılmıştır. Sonuçta olarak; dikkatlice hazırlanmış, müşterilerine belli bir misafirperverlik gösteren, belli bir kaplıca servisi ve

*Assistant Prof / topraklokman@gmail.com

**Associate Prof. / samah_mahmood2000@yahoo.com

***Associate Prof. / dh_hassan@yahoo.com

sabit fiyatlar sunan profesyonel bir kaplıca yeni yerlerin de tanıtımının yapılmasıyla çalışılan sahadaki kaplıca turizmini arttırmada bir avantaj olabilecektir. Ayrıca araştırma; modern sağlık hizmetleri ve geleneksel hizmetler arasında daha çok işbirliğini desteklemenin Türkiye'deki kaplıca bölgelerini ekonomik olarak kalkındıracağını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler Kaplıca, termal oteller, sağlıklı yaşam şekli, tarihi bölgeler, Turkey

Introduction

The Spa concept has become a significant part of the dynamic hospitality and leisure industry. Spas¹ have long been enjoyed since thousands of years ago. On the strength of some findings in Egypt, Greece, Iran and Italy, it was claimed that people from diverse cultural backgrounds have been using thermal waters for healing function for a long time. Apart from their therapeutic utilization, many of the ancient civilizations used thermal baths as a significant part of their social structure (Balogllu and Mangaloglu, 2001; Spaa Assocition, 2002 Vierville, 2003).

The therapeutic use of baths was extremely long-lasting, Hippocrates, the father of medicine, was the first to announce that "nature cures illness". In addition, Thalassotherapy which is known as therapeutic activities in marine waters and under marine atmospheric conditions" has recently been defined as "an ancient Greek system of water-based treatments using seawater, seaweed, algae, and sea air" (Burt and Price 2001). Bathing and hygiene were the most significance cultural habits in Anatolian Seljuqs carried from the Middle Asia in the 16th century (Kulekci ÖC 2010).

On the other hand the growth of health food industry, gyms and the investment in leisure facilities proves that consumers are looking for more than relaxation during a break or holiday; this is an unsurprising fact when time is so precious (Lynch, 2002). Harmsworth (2004) claims that "the spa market is one of the fastest growing leisure sectors, where societal trends and aspirations find instant reflection in the developments on both the demand and supply sides. The market is very fragmented, each segment catering for different customer needs, which continuously change in line with social and lifestyle changes" Hunter-Jones (2001) comments on the fact that "today a social revolution has occurred and health [spa] tourism now covers a wide spectrum of people with diverse interests from pure medical consumers to tourism consumers."

Accordingly, based on these facts, we suggest that a real co-operation between the government (represented in the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Culture and Tourism), civil society and the private sector as well as applying more sufficient international promotion and effective marketing strategies, the country could enhance its real potential though. Therefore, it is very important to place an emphasis on the unexploited existing potential of thermal resources and to stress the related challenges of the existing certified thermal hotels at the studied region to enable their sustainable use for the regional development taking into consideration its geographical location, natural and historical attractions, climate and current healthcare infrastructure.

Literature review

Thermal tourism or thermal springs and baths play an important part in health tourism which combines various fields and methods for curing such mineralized thermal water bath, drinking and inhalation sources, mud baths and the complimentary therapies like climate cure, physiotherapy, rehabilitation, mecanotherapy, exercise, psychotherapy and diet (Özbek, 1991; Tengilimoğlu et al., 2001; Garcia Altes, 2004).

The European Spas Association's (ESPA) definition of a spa is dependent upon the water element. They define a spa as "a mineral spring or a place or resort where such a spring is found"

¹ It has long been thought that the word 'spa' is an abbreviation of the Latin phrase „sanitas or salude per aquas” - meaning 'health through water', however, the Oxford English dictionary's definition of a spa is from the Latin „solus per aqua” or „health by water” defined as “a place with mineral springs considered to have health-giving properties” (Loverseed, 1998), therefore suggesting that traditionally, water is not only inexplicably linked to the definition of spas, but that it is the water which defines it.

(Jenner and Smith, 2000). The spa should be staffed by appropriately trained therapists and have minimum standards of furnishings. The water should be enhanced with minerals, either naturally or with an additive". The Kentucky-based International Spa Association (ISPA) supports this view by claiming that spas are "devoted to enhancing overall well-being through a variety of professional services that encourage the renewal of mind, body and spirit" (Mintel, 2005).

Today's spa is a remarkable combination of ancient traditions and modern facilities; in recent years, the value of illness prevention, healthy lifestyles, and relaxation has been embraced by many and the spa is again finding its place in modern society to address these needs (Register, 2005). Thornton and Brutscher (2003) claim that the word and the concept of spa actually dated back to the time of the Roman Empire when battle weary soldiers tried to find a way to recover from their military wounds and sicknesses. Several findings of bath houses and mosaics in Anatolia prove this fact². As the Romans looked at the spa bathing culture as an essential social practice of hospitality as well as a political and group activity that provided gymnastic and intellectual exercises, aesthetic and spare time activities, they introduced the *thermae* as a main center for social and recreational activity³.

According to Dal (2007) "The developments in health tourism have been increasing in Turkey as the right of patients to seek treatment abroad has been extended in years and European Union (EU) clarified that health care provision is considered to be a service under European Law. The candidate countries of EU, including Turkey, have a valuable potential for providing cheaper and high quality health services".

In recent years, the ancient idea of using thermal waters for both therapeutic and socio-recreational purposes rather than for bathing practice has come into sight as a new concept which called thermal tourism (Anonymous, 2007, Dal, 2007; Tunç and Saç, 1998; Kaynar, 2005). Moreover, thermal tourism is being marketed in terms of 'wellness': the holistic search for improved health and physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing (Bushell & Sheldon 2009). Consequently thermal tourism is again finding its place in modern society as an essential strategy for the countries' tourism development since it meets the customers' expectations by offering activities that combine health care with economical short vacations.

Turkey has great potential for health tourism. This explains why 27 million tourists visiting Turkey each year. On the basis of this fact, Turkey was ranked as the seventh of the top ten international tourism destinations in 2011 (*UNWTO World Tourism Barometer*). The number of health tourists coming to Turkey has been increasing regularly for the past three years. While 74,093 patients came to Turkey in 2008, there were 91,952 in 2009 and about 110,000 in 2010. The total number of patients who came to Turkey from 2008 to 2010 is 275,723 (<http://www.dw.de/dw/article>).

Turkey is also claimed to be the most attractive country for major medical operations compared to other tourism destinations, including the United States. This fact has been indicated by the statistics of the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey, 2009 comparative prices analysis. (<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com>, 2010). The promising position of Turkish health tourism is achieved by the high- quality of healthcare facilities, the high experience levels of competent human resources at par with European standards technological infrastructure, reasonable

² For instance, the antique city Hierapolis and Pamukkale 197 BC; The historical cities of Laodikeia, Herakleia, Tripolis, Afrosidyas at the Denizli thermal area ; Situated on the Roman site of the Baths of Agamemnon - possibly the first hydrotherapy site in the ancient world The Balçova/Izmir hot thermal springs. For further readings see: <http://www.pamukkale.org.tr> ; http://www.adiyamanli.org/hot_springs_and_spas_in_turkey.htm , (accessed on 01-04-2012)

³ Roman *thermae* included a group of hot-air baths (much like a tiled sauna), frigid pools. Built around the central bathing area was a large walking area (*ambulacrum*) with space for libraries, lecture rooms, art and sculpture galleries, multipurpose meeting and ceremonial halls, shaded parks and promenades, small theaters, indoor athletic halls, and occasionally sports stadiums. (Paul de Vierville, 2000).

prices, unique geographical location as a bridge between Europe and the Middle East, pleasant climate, short waiting time; the country's cultural and historical heritage, hospitality facilities at high standards. (<http://www.euphoriahealthcare.com/Turkey>) (<http://www.todayszaman.com>) . In addition, the number of travelers for thermal tourism within the context of health tourism has recently increased accordingly. A major strength of the thermal tourism industry in Turkey is that, on one hand, it is blessed by one of the richest geothermal and medical water resources in the world. The characteristics of these resources are very unique regarding flow rate, temperature, chemical components and physical characteristics when compared to other European counterparts parallels (Anonymous 2007b; Dal, 2007) http://www.jeotermalderne_i.org.tr .

On the other hand, thermal tourism is supported by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and is attached great importance in Turkey (Ministry of Turkish Culture and Tourism, 2009). There are approximately 190 spa resorts in 46 cities in Turkey. The number of beds in the ten resorts that have received a tourism investment certificate from Ministry of Culture and Tourism for the purpose of thermal tourism and certified as an appropriate cure center by Ministry of Health is 2461 and the number of beds in the 30 resorts that have received a tourism operation license is 8562. Approximately 156 resorts with a capacity of 16,000 beds have been documented by the local administration (Ministry of Turkish Culture and Tourism, 2010a). Recently, thermal tourism has become quite essential. Accordingly, new steps are continued to be taken and investments for thermal tourism in the region are made. This has been translated in the Thermal Tourism Cities Project (TTCP) which is considered one of the main targets of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism strategy to make Turkey the top destination in the world for thermal tourism by 2023, and the planned thermal capacity of Turkey is expected to go up to 50.000 beds within the next few years (Çelebi, 2011).

As mass tourism declines and people are interested in new and different experiences, growth in therapeutic and recreational tourism via the thermal tourism sector is flourishing as an alternative products in many parts of the world. Many countries develop great investments on this sector around the world. In 2000, Germany provided a total of 69 million days of thermal treatments to 10 million people. About 8.5 million patients in Germany and Hungary, 8 million in Russia, 1 million in France, 800 thousand in Switzerland got thermal treatment services from abroad (WMDA, 2011).

Thermal Facilities are establishments that include thermal hotels, cure centers, cure parks, and physical treatment hospitals. Typical thermal facilities could be equivalent to Spas since they have had many forms and offer certain treatments. Later on, new types of spas have been addressed by the International Spa Association (ISPA) (Burt and Price 2001): Club Spa: a facility whose primary purpose is fitness and which offers a variety of professionally administered spa services on a day-use basis. Cruise Ship Spa: a spa aboard a cruise ship providing professionally administered spa services fitness and wellness components, and spa cuisine menu choices. Day Spa: a spa offering a variety of professionally administered spa services to clients on a day-use basis. Destination Spa: a destination spa is a facility with the primary purpose of guiding individual spa-goers to develop healthy habits. Historically a seven-day stay, this lifestyle transformation can be accomplished by providing a comprehensive program that includes spa services, physical fitness activities, wellness education, healthful cuisine, and special interest programming. Medical Spa: a facility that operates under the full-time, on-site supervision of a licensed health care professional whose primary purpose is to provide comprehensive medical and wellness care in an environment that integrates traditional spa services complimentary and/or alternative therapies and treatments. The facility operates covering both Aesthetic/Cosmetic and Prevention/Wellness procedures and services. Resort/Hotel Spa: a spa owned by and located within a resort or hotel providing professionally administered spa services, fitness and wellness components, and spa cuisine menu choices. In addition to the leisure guest, this is a great place for business travelers who wish to take advantage of the spa experience while away from home.

Therefore, Thermal facilities in Turkey have been classified by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism into three categories: thermal facilities that serve bathing purposes; those that serve medical purposes, and those that serve medical and tourism purposes. However, thermal hotels can be licensed by: Local governments, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 1988). Since it provides services to meet their customers' expectations, it can be said that thermal tourism is expected to highly participate in developing the economy of the South –east region of Turkey by taking the following two facts into consideration:

- Competitive spa, according to (DeVierville, 1998), should offer facilities for water therapy, natural healing mud, fitness and massage facilities, herbal treatment ,healthy nutrition , hygiene service and cultural activities and social programs. All should be supported by unique environmental surroundings and climate.

- Improving service quality by considering customer satisfaction is a major factor in enhancing the thermal tourism business. This basically depends on the related knowledge, experience, appearance, attitudes and behavior of the staff that have direct communication and interaction with the tourists.

The relation between the customer satisfaction and the received positive feedback was a subject of many studies that has recently been conducted by many scholars. These include an increase in customers' tendency to make contact with the business and create a relationship (Kelley & Davis, 1994; Lee & Heo, 2009; Morgan & Hunt, 1994), as well as generating customer loyalty (Oliver & Burke, 1999). Other points noticed include providing the business with positive feedback (Webb and Jagun, 1997) and increasing the number of customers and profitability of the business (Hanc,er, 2003). Finally, making a contribution to the customer-citizenship behavior (Bettencourt, 1997), as well as increasing business performance, is of great importance (Gronholdt, Martensen and Kristensen, 2000). It will be worthy for people who are managing thermal hotels to put these facts into consideration when dealing with their customers, because not only are thermal hotels vital to Turkey, but the services and qualifications of such hotels are also very important.

The characteristics listed below make thermal hotels different from other hospitality establishments and increase the importance of thermal hotels.

1. Average length of stay is longer than other types of hotels.
2. Thermal hotels include cure and therapy centers.
3. Elderly customers, disabled customers or therapy purposed customers generally stay at thermal hotels.
4. Thermal hotels can only be built near thermal sources.
5. Demand for thermal hotels increases generally in winter and thermal hotels are giving service the whole year. (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2006)

Methodology and Material

This is an exploratory study in which information is collected by using two techniques:

The first (a) content analysis; aims to question whether the images of Turkey that is presented in governmental and non-governmental websites promotional material for tourism reveal any particular symbols or images of the thermal Spas at the South-east of Turkey in terms of commercializing, the studied region as a thermal destination for tourists. In other words, the content analysis study will provide an admirable and timely opportunity to assess if the websites constructed by the official tourism authorities or by the travel agencies, promote or sell the thermal Spas at the South-east of Turkey as one of the top thermal spa destinations in Turkey.

The second (b) An exploratory study in which information is collected using survey technique which is supported with interview technique. The administration of the questionnaire spanned a

period of four months from February 2012 to May 2012. A random sample of 450 guests, all from Turkish geographical background in face-to-face questionnaire interviews were chosen from different thermal hotels in South-eastern Turkey. It resulted in 400 completed responses with a recovery rate percentage of 88.8%. The participants were asked to select from a list of choices. The questionnaire data were analyzed with the computer program SPSS (Statistical Analyzed Program of Social Science) Version 16.

The Studied area:

Turkey is among notable countries of the world when it comes to geothermal resources. Turkey has advanced from 11th place to 5th place worldwide in using geothermal resources directly. The Southeastern Region has an important share in geothermal resources. Diyarbakir (Cermik), Batman (Taslidere), Siirt (Billoris), Sirnak (Hista and Zumrutdag), Sanliurfa (Karaali), Mardin (Dargecit-Germav), have geothermal resources in the region.

Discussion

(a) Content analysis

Content analysis is a particularly useful research tool as it is ideally suited to systematically quantifying and classifying the content of media messages (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1990). A few tourism studies have used content analysis to investigate the visual images used in tourism marketing (Uzzel 1984; Hughes 1992; Hopkins 1998; Davies and Bradbery 1999). In this respect, Thomas Carney (1972) defined the content analysis as a method "for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages". Content analysis of visual information, including images in travel brochures or websites, can provide a great deal of information about the images projected from a tourism destination. In the meantime, as information is the base bone of the travel industry, adequate use of information technology is pivotal for marketing and promotion-related activities (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2006). This study employed the content analysis to analyze the data derived from some governmental and non-governmental websites in Turkey.

The research survey focuses on the websites pictures and textual comments of:

(1) The most important governmental websites, such as The Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Association of Thermal Tourism in Turkey and some of the municipalities' websites of the South-east region in Turkey.

(2) The sample of non-governmental websites including some thermal and medical tourism websites as well as the travel agencies' situated in Turkey. The investigated sample represents about 20% of the tourist agencies that offer Turkey holidays, tours and travel packages of the total number of travel agencies in Turkey. It represents also the travel agencies that offered more services concerning thermal tourism and some thermal hotels websites.

After reviewing other image attributes (Baloglu and Mangalolu; 2001; Hayes and Macleod, 2006; Molina and Esteban, 2006), 25 attributes were selected for investigating the potential of thermal tourism and the image of the South-east thermal springs and the general offered facilities in the official websites. Each attribute was rated by the researcher on a 5-point Likert scale (deeply satisfied, satisfied, moderate, dissatisfied, and deeply dissatisfied). A sixth 'not applicable' category was offered for image attributes.

30 travel agencies websites were examined and arranged in two categories:

- 1- The type of tourist facilities and activities depicted.
- 2- The type of sightseeing depicted.

Table 1: Attributes used to measure tourist images of thermal regions of South-eastern Turkey in the official (governmental) websites.

Attributes	
1- Natural attractions	14- Safety and security
2- Rich landscape	15- Unpolluted environment
3- Historical attraction	16- Night life and entertainments
4- Culture	17- Thermal Spas
5- Tourist facilities	18- Friendly and hospitably people
6- Weather	19- Local life and customs
7- Active tourism (sports activities)	20- Luxury
8- Four season beaches	21- Magical, majestic, memorable
9- Experience of different culture	22- Mysterious, unique
10- Price/quality ratio	23- Festival, events and conferences
11- Meet family/friends	24- Relaxing and comforting
12- Discover something new	25- Sunny
13- Local infrastructure	

A-The Official Authorities' websites (governmental):

After the content analysis of the chosen websites by the selected attributes, which displayed in table (1), the researchers found the following:

Considerable information about the four studied thermal springs is only presented in the websites of some local municipalities'. The given information describes the studied area as main domestic thermal therapeutic centers in Turkey. Unfortunately, all the information given is available only in Turkish, and there were no offers to promote the thermal spas or complexes of the regions internationally. Similar information about Diyarbakir has been addressed by the website of Association of Thermal Tourism in Turkey. On the contrary; there was no mention to the rest of the studied regions.

By using the selected attributes, the image of Turkey can be described as the following: memorable historical attraction and culture weather were ranked as satisfied attributes on the Likert scale. Hence, these websites targeted only cultural tourism. On the other hand, four season beaches, tourist facilities, local infrastructure, luxury, relaxing and comforting attributes, sunny; were ranked as moderate. In addition, natural attractions, rich landscape, nightlife/entertainment (pubs, music), price/quality ratio, local infrastructure, safety and security, festival, events and conferences, active tourism (sports activities); meet family/friends were ranked as dissatisfied. Moreover, Safety and security, unpolluted environment, local life and customs' attributes ranked very dissatisfactory. Finally, the official websites did not refer to the rest of the selected attributes (experience of different culture, discover something new, thermal regions at the south east of Turkey, friendly and hospitable people) despite the fact that, its important to the new trends of the international tourist market.

Briefly, most of the previous attributes ranked as moderate, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied, and not applicable; therefore, the general image of the southeastern region as a tourist place in Turkey needs to be enhanced.

B-Travel agencies websites

The evaluated websites did not provide any information about the thermal springs of the studied region or the thermal spas which are located in Batman and Urfa. More than 60% of the selected travel agencies stick to the traditional cultural, religious, adventure, honeymoon/ seaside/ beach, blue cruise and yachting package tours. Istanbul tours, Cappadocia tours, Ephesus tours, Antalya package, Trabzon- black sea package , Gallipoli and Troy package are offered as the most popular city tours at most of the examined websites. In the meantime, Istanbul, Marmara, Aegean, Mediterranean, Black Sea and Central Anatolia have been counted to be the top tourist sites at most of the studied websites. Some of the websites such as <http://www.allaboutturkey.com/top-sites.htm> cited Eastern Anatolia among the former top tourist destinations. However, there was still no reference to the thermal spas over there. The rest percentage (40%) that provided information about

thermal spas and top famous hot springs destinations is stuck to the famous thermal spas in Antalya, Bodrum, Bursa, Canakkale, Istanbul, İzmir, Marmaris and Pamukkale.

C-Thermal hotels' websites

The importance of information technology in the travel and tourism industry, especially the World Wide Web, has rapidly increased over the past decade. As information is the base bone of the travel industry, efficient use of information technology is pivotal for marketing and promotion-related activities (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2006). As for consumers, the Internet allows them to communicate directly with hotels, to get information and purchase services without any geographical and time constraints. For thermal hotel managers, in particular sales and marketing managers, the successful factors for hotel websites are lower distribution costs, higher revenues, and a larger market share (O'Connor 2003). Accordingly, the Internet is highly recommended for thermal hotels as a significant communication and marketing tool.

Analyzing some thermal hotels websites in Turkey showed that thermal hotels websites are not sufficient enough to serve as a marketing tool for the following reasons:

1. Half of the investigated thermal hotel websites do not provide services in other languages. Multi-language options will enable hotels to reach global markets. For that reason, thermal hotel managers should add Multilanguage options to their websites.

2. It can be seen that reservation information, including reservation policies, payment and online communications with customer representatives is lacking. Most hotels do not have such services and they need to realize the importance of detailed reservation systems and they should offer this kind of services.

3. Hotel facilities information - including online shopping, frequent guest programs, and special services for children or elderly people are not given in many hotel web sites. Thus, the managers should develop their websites to include more detailed information and they should add these services.

4. It was found that most of the thermal hotels do not have enough website management. Attributes such as a visitor counter, date last updated and links to other sites like some related websites especially those that provide information for tourists about Turkey such as visa information, climate, important event calendar, websites or addresses of famous clinics or hospitals that provide accredited healthcare and cosmetic thereby ... etc should be developed.

5. People, who come to thermal hotels to recover, need a special diet program and health center at most. Therefore, thermal hotel managers should pay more importance to the development of general health centers and special diet programs for customers. On the other hand, the results show us that these services are at least offered to the customers by their hotels, and the services offered by thermal hotels should be effectively introduced in the website.

6. Though nearly half of the thermal hotels in Turkey have websites, thermal hotel managers should give more importance to update these websites. The thermal hotels that do not have websites should build websites in order to find more and new international and national markets and also to make the hotel's advertisement more effectively. This result supported with Kozak, (1996) who stated that the management of thermal springs in Turkey is still not developed properly in terms of service variety and quality, on the other hand there have been inadequate efforts to highlight and introduce thermal tourism industry as a health tourism related category to the international market especially in the Southeastern region of Turkey. (<http://www.nirvanainter-national.com/spa/index.php>.)

(b) A questionnaire of thermal hotels customers:

1- Socio-demographic features:

(Table 2) illustrate the socio-demographic features of the survey participants. According to the given information, a percentage of (69.5) female guests formed the majority of the studied sample. The average age of the participants ranged between 35 and 44 of a percentage of (59.25 %). The research teamwork did not expect this result. On the contrary, participants aged 55 and over supposed to form the majority of thermal hotels clients'. Based on these findings, more efforts should be developed to enhance other activities and improve service quality to meet the expectations of the rest of the age categories. Table (3) shown also that nearly half of the respondents had Primary School educations (47.5%) and (10.5%) of the respondents are working as businessmen. (43%) are employee, (7.5%) are students and 39% are Unemployed or housewife. Nearly half of the respondents (47%) have average monthly income between 1000 and 2000 TL. It is well known that the Spa tourism is called as the elite people tourism to have only a percentage of (10.5) businessmen as a customer.

Table 2: Socio-demographic features of participants

Characteristic	N=400	%
Gender:		
Male	122	30.5
Female	278	69.5
Age:		
Less than 25	35	8.75
Between 25 and 34	30	7.5
Between 35 and 44	237	59.25
Between 45 and 54	48	12
55 and over	50	12.5
Characteristic	N=400	%
Educational Level		47.5
Primary School Education	190	
High School Education	143	35.75
College	50	12.5
Post Graduate	17	4.25
Employment status		
Business man	42	10.5
Employee	172	43
Student	30	7.5
Unemployed or housewife	156	39
Average monthly income		
Less than 1000 TL	112	28
Between 1000 and 2000 TL	188	47
Between 2000 and 3000 TL	70	17.5
3000 and over	30	7.5

2-Duration of stay in thermal hotels:

Table (3) shows that the majority of guests staying at hotels were between 1-7 days (70%). This finding is similar to the study performed by Cevdet and Seda (2011), which reported that, although thermal tourism is one of the longest overnight stay tourism types, the finding shows us that thermal hotels in Turkey do not currently maximizing their potential. This outcome could be a result of insufficient current thermal facilities and given activities that attract people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Table 3: Duration of stay in thermal hotels

Content	N= 400	%
Between 1 and 7 days	280	70
Between 8 and 15 days	88	22
Between 16 and 21 days	32	8
Between 21 and over	-	-

3- Sources of information about thermal hotels:

(Table 4) indicate that (42%) depend on word of mouth as sources of information, meaning that the customers need to speak and bargain face-to-face; that is to say, there is a need for social interaction in order for a transaction to take place. According to Özturan and Rooney (2004), companies are becoming aware of the importance of word of mouth. In the meantime, websites are not counted anymore as a source of information (0%) for any one. This may be a result of the inadequate and un-updated information that was provided by the internet. In this context, more attention should be paid to highlight the role of Internet as a marketing tool especially internationally.

Table 4: Sources of information about thermal hotels

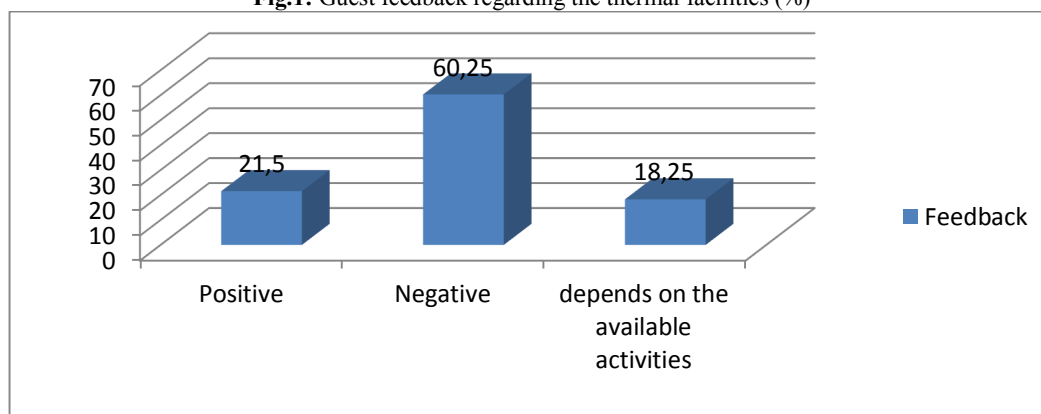
Sources of information	N=400	%
TV	67	16.75
Radio	35	8.75
Newspaper	27	6.75
Magazine	18	4.5
Phone	-	-
Brochure	-	-
Travel agencies	80	20
Word of mouth	186	42
Tourist guide	-	-
Computer reservation system	5	1.25
SMS	-	-
E-mail	-	-
Web	-	-

5- Feedback regarding the thermal facilities in the studied region:

The results relating to respondent's feedback regarding the thermal facilities in the studied region are shown in Figure (1). The received feedback was unfortunately negative with a percentage of (60.25%), meaning that much effort should be made to enhance the thermal facilities in the region regarding:

- The high level of quality assurance regarding management system.
- Local remedies, (like Protection of natural healing water and mud).
- Hygiene, therapeutic applications and wellbeing.
- Accommodation, general food safety HACCP, range of meals and patient safety

Fig.1: Guest feedback regarding the thermal facilities (%)



6- Priorities of choosing thermal hotels:

(Table 5) illustrate priorities of choosing thermal hotels where (17.5%) of the respondents give priority to prices, (17%) for food hygiene, (16.25%) entertainment, (16%) for location , (12.5%) quality of services, (12%) for proficiency of staff members and (8.75%) for standardized of thermal water .On the other hand, historical attractions have not been put into consideration when a person was making up his decision in planning a Spa visit, and this must be put into consideration. Enhancing service quality, providing employee training sessions; developing many recreational activities; adopting European standard of food safety HACCP and supporting thermal hotel location by developing local infrastructure will attract people from diverse cultural backgrounds where the purpose of the travel is to improve health and treat in spas and alternative therapies (Henderson 2004).

Table 5: The personal priorities about thermal hotels choices

The personal priorities	N= 400	%
Price	70	17.50
Food Hygiene	68	17
Service Quality	50	12.5
Standardized of thermal water	35	8.75
Location	64	16
Proficiency level of staff members	48	12
Historical place	--	-
Entertainment	65	16.25

7- Rating thermal hotels prices':

Table (6) shows that (55%) respondents find thermal hotels expensive, (25-5%) find the price coasts of stay quite reasonable and (19.5%) find thermal hotels are moderate in proportional to available facilities. It supported the statement mentioned before that the growth of health food, gyms and the investment in leisure facilities proves that consumers are looking for more than relaxation during a break or holiday; this is unsurprising when time is so precious (Lynch, 2002).

Table 6: Rating thermal hotels prices'

Content	N= 400	%
Reasonable	102	25.5
Expensive	220	55
Moderate	78	19.5

8- Thermal hotels visiting time:

Visiting time is given according to(Table 7) and indicates visiting time as the whole year around ,in winter (4205%), in springs (15%),in summer (23.7%) and autumn (18.75%).This result is matching with the information that has been given by the local municipalities and thermal hotels websites and in line with Ministry of Culture and Tourism (2006) in which it is stated that the demand for thermal hotels increases generally in winter, and thermal hotels are giving service the whole year.

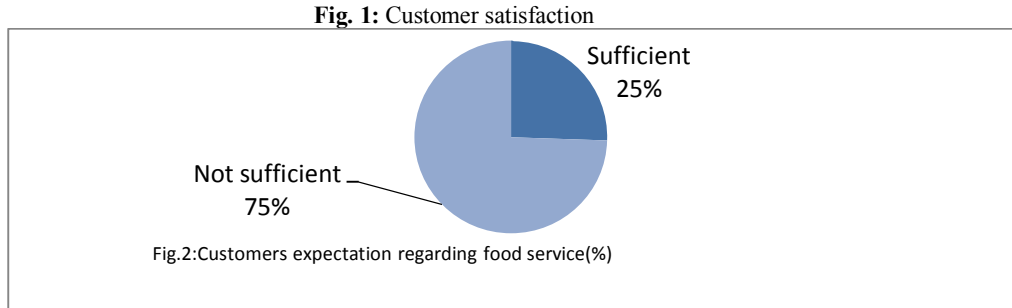
Table 7: Thermal hotels visiting time

Visiting time	No=400	%
Winter	170	42,5
Springs	60	15
Summer	95	23.7
Autumn	75	18.75

10- Customers' expectations regarding food service offered by thermal hotel

Fig.(2) indicates that thermal hotels in the investigated area do not offer for a (74.5%) of the participants' sufficient food service in terms of special diet programs for guests, special menus for guests with health problems and special services for disabled guests This finding is similar to the sudy of Cevdet, Ibrahim and Seda (2011) , which reported that special diet programs for guests and

general health centers are the least offered amenities; they also stated that, whereas there is no doubt that people who come to thermal hotels to recover would need a special diet program and health center at most. Therefore, this finding shows us that thermal hotels in Turkey do not give enough importance to the most required needs for customers.



On the basis of the above mentioned findings, the following conclusions and recommendations have been addressed:

Conclusion

Thermal tourism as a branch of health tourism provides benefits both for health and recreation and requires services and facilities for accommodation, catering and cures etc. Although the primary intent of the visitors is to be cured in the thermal tourism centers, many people who are healthy also prefer these sites for the quality of the recreational services. Overall, the results of the study suggest that a carefully designed, professional day-spa that provides specific hospitality and thermal service guarantee in addition to stable prices and a strong promotion of the new destinations could be a competitive advantage for enhancing thermal tourism in the study area. The study suggests also encouraging further cooperation between the modern health care services and the traditional practitioners in order to enhance the thermal spring regions of Southeastern Turkey economically.

Recommendations

On the strength of the former findings, the following recommendations are made in order to enhance the thermal tourism at the south-east region of Turkey:

1. We argue that a domestic campaign could be very significant to approach the Turkish population with the message of national travel for wellness to reduce stress. We suggest promoting wellness tourism by raising the awareness and the popularity of domestic tourism. This could be done through television channels and radio stations that could basically serve to provide information to the general public about the targeted area in Turkey. Articles could also be allocated in several newspapers and magazines to promote domestic wellness tours.

2. Considering that Internet is an important communication tool and is very important for thermal hotels to use it as an effective marketing tool, thermal hotels can advertise and market their businesses to both domestic and international markets. This can be provided by increasing the usage of the Internet by thermal hotels with their website. Accordingly, we suggest that multi-language options should be added to the thermal hotels websites.

3- Websites should be developed and updated to include more detailed information about hotel facilities including online shopping, frequent guest programs, and special services for children or elderly people as well as reservation information including reservation policies, payment and online communications.

4- For some people, the Internet could not be used as an effective marketing tool because they do not consider the Internet as a safe purchasing tool. Therefore, suggestions should be made to

develop safe Internet security payment systems and also inform the customers about the security system.

5- Thermal hotel websites should be updated regularly. The thermal hotels, that do not have websites, should build websites in order to find more and new international and national markets and also to make the hotel's advertisement more effectively.

6- The finding shows that thermal hotels in Turkey do not currently maximizing their potential. This outcome could be a result of insufficient current thermal facilities. Thus, there should be more activities and enhancing overall well-being through a variety of professional services that encourage the renewal of mind, body and spirit that attract people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

7- People, who come to thermal hotels to recover, need a special diet program and health center most. Therefore, more attention should be paid to the development of general health centers and special diet programs for customers.

8- Overall, the results of the study suggest that a carefully designed, professional day-spa that provides specific certified and accredited hospitality and enhancing service quality, providing employee training sessions; developing many recreational activities; adopting European standard of food safety HACCP and supporting thermal hotel location by developing local infrastructure, in addition to stable prices and a strong promotion of the new destinations could be a competitive advantage for enhancing thermal tourism in the studied area.

We suggest that a real co-operation between the government (represented in the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Culture and Tourism), civil society and the private sector as well as applying more sufficient domestic and international promotion and effective marketing strategies, the country could enhance its real potential.

Bibliography

Anderson, E.W., Fornell, C., & Lehmann, D.R. (1994). Customer satisfaction, market share, and profitability: findings from Sweden. *Journal of Marketing*, 58, 53–66.

Anonymous (2007). İllere Göre Termal Turizm, Yalova Termal Kaplıcaları Yatırım Olanakları, Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, Web Sitesi: www.kulturturizm.gov.tr, accessed: 25/01/2010.

Baloglu, S. and Mangaloglu, M. (2001). Tourism Destination Image of Turkey, Egypt, Greece, and Italy as perceived by US-based Tour Operator and Travel Agents. *Journal of tourism Management*, Vol.22, pp.1-9

Bettencourt, L.A. (1997). Customer voluntary performance: customers as partners in service delivery. *Journal of Retailing*, 73, 383–406.

Burt, B. and Price, P., (2001). "100 Best Spas of the World", (Guilford: The Globe Pequot Press).

Bushell, R. and Sheldon, P.J. (eds.) (2009) *Wellness and Tourism: mind, body, spirit, place*, Cognizant Communication Corporation, New York

Çelebi Turabi, Thermal Tourism in Turkey,08-07-2011 <http://issuu.com/evectweb/docs/turabi-celebi---thermal-tourism-in-turkey> (accessed 26-04-2011)

Cevdet Avcıkurt, Ibrahim Giritlioglu and Seda Sahin (2011). An evaluation of thermal hotel websites and the use/non-use of the Internet as a marketing tool by thermal hotels in Turkey. *African Journal of Business Management* Vol. 5(7), pp. 2817-2827

Dal F. (2007). The Reasons And Suggested Solutions Of Underdevelopment Of Thermal Tourism In Turkey, The Graduate School of Engineering and Sciences of İzmir Institute of Technology City Planning Department. Master Thesis. İzmir.

Davies, J. and Bradbery, P. (1999). *Gender advertisements and tourism brochures*. Paper presented at the Australian Tourism and Hospitality Education (CAUTHE) 9th National Research Conference, Adelaide, February.

DeVierville, J. P. (1998). Director, Alamo Plaza Spa at the Menger Hotel, San Antonio, TX, personal communication, (also on the Board of Directors of the International Spa Association Foundation).

DeVierville, J.P.(2003). Spa industry, culture and evolution: Time, temperature, touch and truth. *Massage & Bodywork*, August/ September, 2003; 20Đ31.

Garcia Altes (2004). The Development of Health Tourism Service. *Ann.Tourism Res. Spain* 32(1):262-266.

Gronholdt, L., Martensen, A., & Kristensen, K. (2000). The relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty: cross-industry differences. *Total Quality Management*, 11, 509–514.

Hanc,er, M. (2003). Customer loyalty in hospitality sector: definition, importance, effect and results. *Travel and Tourism Research Journal*, 3, 1–2.

Hayes, D. and Macleod, N. (2006) Packaging Places: Designing Heritage Trails Using an Experience Economy Perspective to Maximize Engagement. *Journal of vacation Marketing*, Vol.13, No.1, pp. 45-58.

Henderson, J. C. (2000), Selling Places: The New Asia–Singapore Brand. *Journal of Tourism Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 36-44.

Hopkins, J. (1998). "Commodifying the Countryside: Marketing Myths of Rurality". *In Tourism and Recreation in Rural Areas*, ed. R. Butler, C. M. Hall and J. Jenkins, pp. 139–56. West Sussex: Wiley.

Hughes, G. (1992), Tourism and the Geographical Imagination. *Leisure Studies*, Vol. 11, No.1, pp. 31–42.

Hunter-Jones, P. (2001). *Holiday-taking and Health (A study of the perceived effects of holiday-taking upon patients treated for cancer*, PhD. Thesis, Dept. of Food, Clothing, Tourism and Hospitality, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester.

Jenner, P. and Smith, C. (2000). Health Tourism in Europe, *Travel and Tourism Analyst*, No.1, pp. 41-59.

Kaynar B (2005). Termal Turizm İşletmelerinde Faaliyete Dayalı Maliyetleme Sistemi ve Afyon İlinde Bir Uygulama, Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi. Afyonkarahisar.

Kelley, W.S., & Davis, M.A. (1994). Antecedents to customer expectations for service recovery. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 22, 52–61.

Kozak N (1996). Termal Turizmi Müsteri Profilini Belirleme Aracı olarak Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Turizm İşletmeciliği Tüketici Araştırmaları: İç Turizme Yönelik Bir Uygulama, İzmir Dokuz Anabilim Dalı. Yüksek Lisans Tezi. İzmir.

Kress, G. and Van Leeuwen, T. (1990), *Reading Images*, Deakin University Press, Geelong, Australia.

Külekci ÖC (2010). Çankiri Çavundur Termal Kaynaklarının Yörenin Turizm Potansiyeli Kapsamında Değerlendirilmesi, Ankara Üniversitesi Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü Peyzaj Mimarlığı Anabilim Dalı Yüksek Lisans Tezi. Ankara.

Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı,, (1988). “Turizm Genel Politikası”. (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları)

Lee, S., & Heo, C.Y. (2009). Corporate social responsibility and customer satisfaction among us publicly traded hotels and restaurants. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 28 635–637.

Lynch, M. (2002). *Health Benefits Fact File*, English Tourism Council, London.

Ministry of Turkish Culture and Tourism (2003). “Thermal Spring Potential of Turkey”. General Directorate of Investment and Establishments Document.

Ministry of culture and tourism (2006) Türkiye Turizm Stratejisi Ankara.

Ministry of Turkish Culture and Tourism (2009). Tourism Strategy of Turkey 2023. Available at: <http://www.kulturturizm.gov.tr/genel/text/eng/TST2023.pdf> (05.03.2009).

Ministry of Turkish Culture and Tourism (2010). Available at: <http://kvmgm.turizm.gov.tr/Genel/BelgeGoster.aspx?F6E10F8892433CFF4A7164CD9A18CEAE00671D8648333F35> (02.07.2010).

Mintel (2005). Spa Holidays-UK, *Mintel International Group Ltd.*

Molina, A. and Esteban, A. (2006) Tourism Brochures, Usefulness and Image. *Journal of Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 1036-1056.

Morgan, R., and Hunt, S.D. (1994). The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 58, 20–38.

O'Connor O (2003). On-line Pricing: An Analysis of Hotel-Company Practices. *Cornell Hotel Restaurant Adm. Q.*, 44 (1): 88-96.

Oliver, R.L., & Burke, R.R. (1999). Expectation processes in satisfaction formation. *Journal of Service Research*, 1(3), 196–214

Özbek T (1991). Dünya'da ve Türkiye' de Termal Turizmin Önemi. *Turizm Çevre ve Kültür Dergisi*. sayı 2: 17-18

Özturan M Roney SA (2004). Internet Use among Travel Agencies in Turkey: an Exploratory Study. *Tour. Manage.*, 25: 259-266.

Paul de Vierville (2003). Taking the Waters, A Historical Look at Water Therapy and Spa Culture Over the Ages, in *Massage & Bodywork* magazine, February/March 2000, Copyright 2003. Associated Bodywork and Massage Professionals.

Register, J. (2005). *Spa evolution, a brief history of spas*. About, Inc. www.spas.about.com/cs/1/aa101902.htm

Spa Association (Spaa) (2002). *The History of Spa*. The Spa Association www.thespaassociation.com/consumer/history.htm

Tengilimoğlu D, Sevin D, Ak B (2001). Türkiye'de Sağlık Turizmi ve Termal Turizmin Gelistirilmesi.

Thornton, F. and Brutscher, H. (2003). *What is a Spa?* International Spa Association (ISPA).

Thomas Carney, (1972). Content Analysis: A Technique for Systematic Inference from Communications. (Winnipeg, Canada: Univ. of Manitoba Press, 1972), p.26

Tunç A, Saç F (1998). Genel Turizm Gelisimi-Geleceği. Detay Yayıncılık. Ankara.

Uzzell, D. (1984), An alternative structuralist approach to the psychology of tourism marketing. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol.11, No.1, pp 79–99.

Vierville, J. P. (2003). *American Healing Waters*. International Spa Association (ISPA). www.experiencespa.com

Wang, Y Fresenmaier DR (2006). Identifying the Success Factors of Web-Based Marketing Strategy: An Investigation of Convention and Visitors Bureaus in the United States. *J. Travel Res.*, 44: 239-249.

Webb, D., and Jagun, A. (1997). Customer care, customer satisfaction, value, loyalty and complaining behavior: validation in a UK university setting. *Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior*, 10, 139–15

WMDA, 2011, West Mediterranean Development Agency, Health Tourism Sector Report, <http://www.investinwmda.org.tr> (accessed- 20-04-2012).

WEB SITES:

<http://www.bibalex.org/alexmed/Publication/default.aspx?type=6> Accessed on 23/3/2012

F.Ü. Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi 2014-24/2

http://www.massagetherapy.com/articles/index.php/article_id/323/Taking-the-Waters(accessed on 22-4-2012)

<http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,15795878,00.html> (accessed 22-4-2012)

<http://www.egyptmemory.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/ProductDisplay?catalogId=10001&storeId=10001&productId=30114&LangId=1> (accessed on 25-4-2012)

<http://www.euphoriahealthcare.com/Turkey-attracts-over-275000-health-tourists-in-three-years.html> 23 March 2011,(accessed on 30-3-2012)

<http://www.todayszaman.com>23 March 2011,UNWTO World Tourism Barometer (UNWTO). Accessed on 27-3-2012

http://www.unwto.org/facts/eng/pdf/barometer/UNWTO_Barom11_iu_april_excerpt.pdf(accessed on 12-4-2102)

<http://www.Çermik.bel.tr>.(accessed on 20-4-2012)

<http://www.Kaplıca.bir/Sürt> (accessed on 20-4-2012)

<http://www.Boto.com.tr>. (accessed on 20-4-2012)

<http://www.Urfakulter.gov.tr>. (accessed on 20-4-2012)